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Volunteer Strategy 2026-2028





“As Chief Executive of Brighton & Hove LGBT Switchboard, I am proud to introduce this Volunteer Strategy – a framework that honours the people who have shaped our organisation for fifty years and will carry us into the next fifty.

For half a century, Switchboard has listened to and stood alongside LGBTQ+ communities through changing times. Again and again, we hear stories of people carrying hidden burdens, of shame, stigma, isolation and distress, while trying to keep going in a world that is still not always safe or welcoming. Volunteers have always been at the heart of our response to these realities. They offer connection where there is loneliness, affirmation where there is doubt, and solidarity where there is struggle.

Volunteering at Switchboard is more than giving time. It is an act of community care. It is a commitment to creating spaces that are trauma-informed, intersectional, and culturally competent where LGBTQ+ people feel genuinely seen, heard, and valued.

Our volunteers bring lived experience, compassion, and insight that cannot be replicated. They are listeners, advocates, organisers, and leaders.

Our ambitions go beyond individual roles. We want volunteering at Switchboard to shape systems, not just services: influencing how our city, our partners, and our sector understand and respond to LGBTQ+ lives. We will strengthen pathways into leadership, embed lived experience in governance, and ensure volunteers are supported, trained, and celebrated at every stage of their journey.

This strategy is both a commitment and an invitation. A commitment to our volunteers that we will invest in your wellbeing, development, and leadership. And an invitation to our communities, partners, and allies to join us in building a volunteer movement that is as bold, compassionate, and resilient as the people it serves.

Together, we can ensure that volunteering at Switchboard is not simply something people do, it is something people belong to.”

Rob Sainsbury (he/him)
Chief Executive, Brighton & Hove LGBT Switchboard





Why We Exist

LGBTQ+ people experience disproportionate harms driven by minority stress, stigma, discrimination, social isolation, and exclusion from culturally safe support. Research and lived experience show that many people turn to coping strategies that mask distress – concealment, withdrawal, hypervigilance, or self-silencing, because mainstream services can feel unwelcoming, unsafe, or rooted in assumptions that do not reflect LGBTQ+ lives. Community members describe offline spaces as hostile or hypermasculine, and statutory services as places where they fear judgement, misgendering, or being misunderstood. Again, people call for LGBTQ+ specific, identity-affirming, trauma-informed support, visible inclusion, peer leadership, and system change.

Switchboard exists to meet that need. For fifty years, we have provided safe, confidential, identity-affirming spaces where LGBTQ+ people can talk, be heard, and find support without fear. Our volunteers are central to this mission: they bring lived experience, compassion, and cultural insight that make our services genuinely inclusive and community-led. We work to make support safe, visible, and dignified – and to transform systems so LGBTQ+ people are recognised, supported, and never left behind.

What LGBTQ+ communities say

Many LGBTQ+ people describe seeking support because of the pressures of minority stress, isolation, and feeling unable to be fully themselves. One person shared, “I just needed someone who understood,” capturing how a single, affirming conversation can cut through shame, rejection, or the exhaustion of hiding parts of who they are.

Mainstream spaces and services often feel unwelcoming or unsafe. People talk about environments that are hypermasculine, heteronormative, or simply not built with LGBTQ+ lives in mind. Others avoid support altogether for fear of judgement, misgendering, or being dismissed.

What people consistently ask for is simple but powerful: support that is LGBTQ+-affirming, trauma-informed, and grounded in lived experience. They want to be met by someone who “gets it,” who understands how identity, mental health, disability, racism, migration, and stigma can intertwine.

This is where volunteers make the difference. Peer connection, compassionate listening, and identity-affirming spaces are some of the strongest protective factors we have. Volunteers help reduce isolation, build trust, and create the kind of community support people say they cannot find elsewhere.



Evidence Base

Research consistently shows that LGBTQ+ people experience higher levels of minority stress, discrimination, and social isolation than the general population. These pressures are intensified for trans and gender-diverse people, and for those with intersecting identities such as people of colour, migrants, disabled LGBTQ+ people, and neurodivergent community members. These overlapping experiences of exclusion increase vulnerability to poor mental health, loneliness, and barriers to accessing support.

Many LGBTQ+ people avoid mainstream services because they fear judgement, misgendering, or being misunderstood. Research highlights that heteronormative assumptions, pathologising language, and a lack of cultural competence can make statutory or community services feel unsafe or unwelcoming. As a result, people often delay seeking help or rely on coping strategies that mask distress rather than address it. What LGBTQ+ communities consistently ask for is simple but powerful: identity-affirming, trauma-informed, culturally competent support delivered by people who understand their lived realities.

This is where volunteering becomes transformative. Evidence shows that peer-led, community-based support is one of the strongest protective factors for LGBTQ+ wellbeing. Social support networks reduce distress, improve mental health outcomes, and increase resilience. Volunteers create these protective environments by offering compassionate listening, shared understanding, and spaces where people feel seen and validated. Their presence builds trust, reduces isolation, and provides culturally competent pathways into further support.

Volunteering also strengthens community resilience more broadly. Studies from NCVO and the King's Fund show that volunteer-led models improve engagement, retention, and outcomes across health and wellbeing services. For LGBTQ+ communities, volunteers play a crucial role in bridging gaps left by mainstream provision, ensuring that people can access support earlier and more safely. They also bring lived experience, insight, and representation that make services feel authentic and inclusive.

Finally, volunteering benefits volunteers themselves. Research from the Institute for Volunteering shows that volunteering improves confidence, skills, and wellbeing, and reduces loneliness, all of which are particularly valuable for LGBTQ+ people who may have experienced exclusion or marginalisation. By creating opportunities for leadership, connection, and personal growth, volunteering strengthens both individuals and the wider community.

In short, volunteering is not just helpful, it is evidence-based, community-driven, and essential to building safety, belonging, and resilience for LGBTQ+ people.



Volunteering Overview

Brighton & Hove LGBT Switchboard's volunteer community is diverse, skilled, and central to everything we do. Our volunteers contribute across the whole organisation, from frontline service delivery to operational support, ensuring that LGBTQ+ people can access safe, inclusive, culturally competent help when they need it most. Volunteers bring lived experience, compassion, and specialist skills that strengthen our services and deepen our connection to the communities we serve.

Volunteers support Switchboard in a wide range of roles. Operational volunteers provide essential behind the scenes capacity, offering administrative support, IT expertise, data handling, communications, and marketing skills that keep the organisation running smoothly. Their work ensures that our services are visible, accessible, and delivered with professionalism and care.

We also involve volunteers in governance and lived experience leadership. Our Lived Experience Advisory Boards and community panels bring together LGBTQ+ people with diverse backgrounds to shape strategy, influence decision-making, and ensure our services remain grounded in the realities of those most affected by inequality, discrimination, and exclusion. Their insight strengthens our cultural competence and ensures our work is genuinely community-led.

Service support volunteers play a vital role across our specialist programmes. In our bereavement services, volunteers offer compassionate listening and peer support to LGBTQ+ people navigating grief and loss. In our older LGBTQ+ and dementia services, volunteers help reduce isolation, build connection, and create safe, affirming spaces for people who may be facing multiple layers of marginalisation. Volunteers also support our gambling harms work and TNBI social prescribing service, offering identity-affirming, trauma-informed support that helps people feel understood, respected, and able to access the help they need.

Across all these areas, volunteers help build resilience, reduce isolation, and create the kind of community-led support that research consistently shows is essential for LGBTQ+ wellbeing. Their contribution is not simply operational, it is transformational. Volunteers make Switchboard's services possible, and they ensure that LGBTQ+ people across Sussex and beyond are recognised, supported, and never left behind.



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Alignment to Switchboard Strategy

Volunteering is not a standalone activity; it is embedded within Brighton & Hove LGBT Switchboard's broader organisational strategy. As Switchboard approaches its 50th anniversary, the charity has set out five strategic themes: Financial Resilience, Governance Maturity, Service Impact & Growth, Partnership Leverage, and Risk Assurance. Volunteering directly contributes to each of these objectives.

Financial Resilience

- **Diversification of capacity:** Volunteers expand organisational reach and capability, reducing reliance on paid staff and short-term contracts.
- **Income for impact:** Volunteer-led campaigns, events, and community engagement strengthen visibility and fundraising potential, generating unrestricted income that supports Switchboard's wider services.
- **Sustainability through engagement:** A strong volunteer base builds long-term resilience by embedding community ownership and reducing operational costs.

Governance Maturity


- **Lived experience embedded:** Volunteer representation on advisory panels and boards ensures governance remains participatory and grounded in community voice, aligning with Switchboard's principle of "by and for."
- **Safeguarding excellence:** Trauma-informed volunteer training and supervision reinforce Switchboard's safeguarding framework and uphold best practice.
- **Transparency and accountability:** Regular volunteer feedback, evaluation, and reporting strengthen accountability to trustees, funders, and communities.

Service Impact & Growth

- **Expanding reach:** Volunteers extend the impact of Switchboard's services – from helpline and bereavement support to older person and dementia services, TNBI social prescribing, and gambling harms work.
- **Enhancing quality:** Volunteer involvement ensures services remain responsive, empathetic, and culturally competent.
- **National visibility:** Volunteer-led outreach and communications amplify Switchboard's profile, helping the organisation reach new audiences and influence national conversations on LGBTQ+ wellbeing.

Partnership Leverage

- **Community convening:** Volunteers strengthen Switchboard's role as a connector across sectors, supporting collaboration with NHS, public health, and local LGBTQ+ organisations.
- **Cross-sector engagement:** Volunteer ambassadors and peer supporters help build referral pathways and trust between statutory and community services.

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- **Advocacy and influence:** Volunteer voices and lived experience testimony enhance Switchboard’s credibility in national advocacy, ensuring LGBTQ+ inclusion is embedded in policy and practice.

Risk Assurance

- **Mitigating engagement risks:** Co-production with volunteers ensures services remain relevant, trusted, and reflective of community needs, reducing the risk of low uptake.
- **Safeguarding risks managed:** Structured training, supervision, and reflective practice prevent burnout and reinforce safe, ethical volunteering.
- **Operational resilience:** A well-supported volunteer workforce provides continuity and stability, reducing risk during funding or staffing transitions.



Our Strategic Fit

- Volunteering embeds Switchboard’s values of inclusion, dignity, and community leadership into every layer of the organisation, ensuring volunteering remains a living expression of our mission and ethos.
- Volunteering strengthens Switchboard’s national profile as a convenor and influencer by showcasing how volunteer-led, community-driven practice can shape inclusive service models and sector standards.
- Volunteering builds organisational resilience by diversifying capacity and reducing reliance on paid staff, creating a sustainable foundation for long-term impact.
- Volunteering expands service reach and depth, enabling Switchboard to deliver compassionate, identity-affirming support across all programmes – from bereavement and older person services to TNBI social prescribing and community engagement.
- Volunteering reinforces governance maturity by embedding lived experience and volunteer representation at every level, ensuring decision-making remains participatory, transparent, and accountable.



Our Volunteering Vision, Mission & Values

Vision

A thriving, diverse, trauma-informed volunteer community that leads, shapes, and strengthens Switchboard's services, ensuring every LGBTQ+ person can access safe, affirming support.



Mission

To recruit, train, support, and celebrate volunteers who reflect the full diversity of LGBTQ+ communities, embedding lived experience across all services and ensuring volunteers feel valued, equipped, and connected.



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Values

- Lived Experience at the Core Volunteers bring insight, authenticity, and leadership.
- Trauma-Informed Practice Safety, dignity, and respect underpin every interaction.
- Cultural Competence & Inclusion Volunteers reflect intersectional LGBTQ+ identities.
- Evidence-Led & Transparent Volunteers contribute to evaluation, learning, and service improvement.
- Collaboration & Partnership Volunteers strengthen community connections and cross-sector pathways.
- Sustainability & Ethical Growth Volunteering is structured, supported, and resourced responsibly.

**LIVED
EXPERIENCES
AT THE CORE**



**TRAUMA-
INFORMED
PRACTICE**



**CULTURAL
COMPETENCE
& INCLUSION**



**EVIDENCE-LED
& TRANSPARENT**



**COLLABORATION
& PARTNERSHIP**



**SUSTAINABLE
& ETHICAL
GROWTH**



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Volunteering Strategic Pillars



Pillar 1: Volunteer Excellence

Objectives

- Recruit volunteers across all Switchboard services
- Deliver high-quality, trauma-informed training
- Provide reflective supervision and wellbeing support
- Ensure volunteers feel safe, valued, and connected

Key Actions

- Launch a Switchboard Volunteer Induction Programme
- Implement quarterly reflective practice groups



Pillar 2: Inclusion, Representation & Lived Experience Leadership

Objectives

- Recruit volunteers from underrepresented groups
- Embed lived experience leadership in governance
- Ensure all volunteer materials use inclusive language and imagery

Key Actions

- Co-produce recruitment campaigns with volunteers
- Establish a Lived Experience Volunteer Network
- Provide intersectional inclusion training



Pillar 3: Governance, Safeguarding & Quality Assurance

Objectives

- Align volunteer processes with Switchboard’s safeguarding, GDPR, and risk frameworks
- Maintain a volunteer risk register
- Ensure volunteers understand boundaries, confidentiality, and data protection

Key Actions

- Quarterly safeguarding audits including volunteer roles
- Annual volunteer satisfaction and safety survey
- Updated volunteer handbook aligned with organisational frameworks



Pillar 4: Sustainability & Growth

Objectives

- Secure funding for volunteer coordination and training
- Develop progression pathways into paid roles, leadership, and governance
- Create a replicable volunteer model for future partnerships

Key Actions

- Produce a Volunteer Sustainability Plan
- Launch a Volunteer Recognition & Progression Framework
- Host an annual Volunteer Celebration & Learning Event

The Overview of Our Two-Year Strategy



Phase 1: Foundations & Re-Launch (2026)

In the first year, we focus on laying strong foundations. Volunteer recruitment and induction are prioritised, embedding lived experience, inclusion, and trauma-informed practice at the heart of our volunteer programme. Safeguarding, supervision, and GDPR frameworks are fully integrated, ensuring volunteering is safe, ethical, and accountable. Core training is delivered across bereavement, older person and dementia services, TNBI social prescribing, gambling harms, and community engagement. Operational volunteers strengthen capacity in administration, IT, communications, and marketing, while a new Lived Experience Volunteer Panel is established to guide governance and feedback. Alongside this, a volunteer awareness campaign launches, celebrating community contribution and raising visibility of volunteering opportunities across Sussex.



Phase 2: Expansion & Deepening Impact (2027 & 2028)

In the second year, we move from foundations to growth. Volunteer numbers increase significantly, with new and expanded roles introduced across bereavement support, older LGBTQ+ and dementia services, TNBI social prescribing, gambling harms, community outreach, and operational functions. A broader range of flexible, accessible volunteer opportunities is created, including remote roles, short-term placements, and specialist skill-based volunteering, ensuring more people can participate in ways that suit their lives and identities.

Training capacity grows, with more than 50 volunteers completing advanced modules in trauma-informed practice, cultural competence, and inclusive communication. This strengthens safeguarding, service quality, and the consistency of volunteer-led support across all programmes. Volunteers assist community engagement at Pride events, outreach activities, and awareness campaigns, amplifying Switchboard's visibility and strengthening community connection., especially through our bereavement, older people and dementia support services. Evaluation and feedback mechanisms are refined, ensuring volunteer experience directly informs organisational learning and continuous improvement. The volunteer programme begins to shape wider sector conversations about inclusion, wellbeing, and community-led practice, positioning Switchboard as a leader in LGBTQ+ volunteering.

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Volunteer Framework



Volunteering has always been integral to Brighton & Hove LGBT Switchboard's identity and impact. As the organisation approaches its 50th anniversary, the Volunteer Framework provides a clear, strategic foundation for how we involve, support, and empower volunteers across all areas of our work. It recognises volunteers not simply as contributors, but as a critical part of Switchboard's infrastructure, cultural competence, and long-term sustainability.

The framework sets out a structured approach to recruitment, training, supervision, wellbeing, and recognition, ensuring that volunteering remains safe, inclusive, and aligned with Switchboard's values of dignity, representation, and community leadership. It reflects our commitment to trauma-informed practice, equitable access, and meaningful participation for LGBTQ+ people across diverse identities and lived experiences.

Volunteers strengthen every part of Switchboard, from BOLD and community services to communications, IT, research, events, evaluation, and fundraising. Their insight and lived experience enhance service design, deepen community connection, and ensure our work remains rooted in the realities of those we serve. The framework ensures that this contribution is supported by robust systems, clear expectations, and consistent quality assurance.

For trustees, the Volunteer Framework provides assurance that volunteering is governed effectively, embedded within organisational strategy, and contributing directly to Switchboard's strategic pillars. It outlines how we maintain safeguarding, uphold EDI commitments, evaluate impact, and continuously improve the volunteer experience. It also ensures that volunteering remains a resilient and scalable asset as the organisation grows.

In essence, the Volunteer Framework positions volunteering as a strategic driver of Switchboard's mission, strengthening our capacity, expanding our reach, and ensuring that our services continue to be shaped by and for LGBTQ+ communities.



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Key Performance Indicators (Year by Year)

Objective	2026	2027	2028	Total
Volunteers Roles Identified	10	15	20	45
Volunteers Recruited	10	15	20	45
Volunteer Retained	70%	75%	80%	75%
Volunteer training Completed	10	15	20	45
Volunteer Health & Wellbeing Meeting Attendance	70%	75%	80%	75%
Volunteer Satisfaction	85%	90%	90%	90%

